

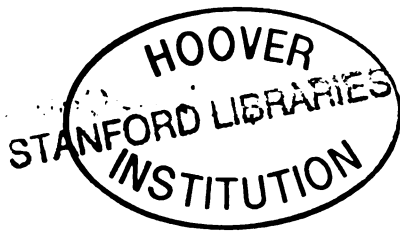
Ethiopia

FROM FEUDAL AUTOCRACY TO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY

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ETHIOPIA

FROM FEUDAL AUTOCRACY

TO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY

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Preface

Ethiopia, the home of a brilliant ancient civilization, as exemplified by the obelisks of Axum, the rock-hewn churches of Lalibella, and by the imposing castles of Gondar, has existed as an independent polity for a number of millennium. It is a land of diverse nationalities. Close to 80 kindered nationalities, ethnic groups and communities inhabit this ancient land. It is also a land of high and rugged mountains, flat topped plateaux, deep gorges, incised river valleys and rolling plains. It's wealth of untapped natural resources and the rich variety of endemic flora and fauna, place Ethiopia among the richly endowed countries of the world.

Situated in the strategic region of the Horn of Africa, and therefore, being placed between tropical Africa and the middle east, Ethiopia has through the ages been a natural crossroad for the meeting of various cultures and civilizations.

This ancient land, which has won the admiration of the entire peace-loving and progressive humanity, for the epic struggles it has carried out over the centuries against foreign aggressors, in defense of freedom and National Sovereignty, up until 1974, remained one of the most backward and underdeveloped countries of the world, and her people, the most destitute. For instance, before the upsurge of the February 1974 Revolution, 85% of the people were landless tenants; 93% illiterate; and 85% of them had no possibility of access to modern medical facilities. Modern industry of any sort hardly existed in Ethiopia prior to the revolution, most, if not all were owned and controlled by foreign monopolists.

The root cause for Ethiopia's backwardness and for the destitution of her people was the odious and archaic feudal system that had reigned supreme in the country for many centuries. Under this social system, land, which was the major means of livelihood for the population, was controlled by few privileged aristocrats, feudal lords, higher clergy of the church, bureaucrats and merchants. All arable land was claimed by these categories of the ruling class. The lot of the peasantry was that of object poverty and destitution. They toiled from

dawn to dusk on the land of the feudallords only to receive a very small portion of their produce. The law gave the feudal lords the right to exact as much as 75% of what the peasants produced.

The feudal millieu, dead set as it was against the spirit of research. and innovation never encouraged hard work and self-reliance. Such skilled people, as blacksmiths, potters, weavers, tanners, etc. were ostracized; despite the fact that the results of their labour are of fundamental importance for social development.

In such a setting, bearing all the marks of underdevelopment and primitive agrarian economy, industry contributed an insignificant share to the country's over all socio-economic development.

In terms of political set up, the pre-revolutionary state machinery was a blend of feudal and modern hierarchy of administration and control, whose sole purpose was protecting and promoting the interests of the feudal lords and their supporters. In such a set up of modernized absolutism, the Ethiopian people could in no way take part in decisions that affected their destiny. Any exercise of even the most rudimentary democratic rights by the masses were allien to the system. Oppression of nationalities and religious groups was a rampant practice, reinforced by the odious theory of "divide and rule."

It was therefore these centuries-old exploitative socio-economic conditions that impelled the Ethiopian people in February 1974 to revolt against and cast away the debilitating feudal socio-economic order leading to far-reaching socio-economic changes as well as to the rejuvenation of this ancient land. The purpose of this special publication is therefore to highlight some of the significant political, economic and social gains that the Ethiopian people have achieved in the last 13 years of revolutionary struggle. The presentation starts off with a brief outline of Ethiopian history; followed by a detailed analysis of the cruel legacy that the feudal system has left for the revolution to resolve. The rest of the publication highlights the major political, economic and social achievements of the Ethiopian revolution, including the efforts made to enable the Ethiopian people to assume state power, through the instrumentality of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

CHAPTER I

ETHIOPIA IN PERSPECTIVE

Ethiopia is one of the oldest continuing polities in the world and may even be the very cradle of humankind as attested to by the recent discovery of the earliest homonid fossil remains, the *Australopithecus Afarensis*,¹ otherwise nicknamed "Lucy" or "Dinknesh". It is a land that has hosted and domiciled the theistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam from the earliest of times to the present day and it figures prominently in their respective literatures. In Ethiopia one finds a blend of African and Middle East cultures and civilizations. The country is virtually a microcosm of the continent being a "museum" of over seventy nationalities of Semitic, kushitic, Nilotic, Bantu etc ... origins.

In modern times Ethiopia is known for its successful struggle against colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Successive waves of aggressions by British and Italian imperialists were rebuffed by the determined struggle of the Ethiopian masses. In so doing Ethiopia became a symbol and a beacon of freedom for all black peoples. Ethiopianism was a rallying cry for nationalist struggle in Southern Africa.² Just as Ethiopia has

been in the vanguard of the struggle against imperialism heretofore, so today it is in the vanguard of revolution and regeneration in the continent as it experiences "Africa's major social revolution."³ In *Ethiopia: Footprint of Time*⁴ the renowned Ethiopian poet, Tsegaye Gebre Medhin, writes that Ethiopia is:

The land where today the human society has undergone, and is undergoing an unbreakable process of transformation, building anew on the achievement of the past; where diversity is a force of unity, where the mosaic of man and nature is being revitalized in a harmonized way, where myth is giving way to reality. We walk on the footprints of the evolutionary Ancestors of man.

Land and people

Geographically, Ethiopia is located between 3° and 18° latitude North at the hub of the Horn of Africa. With an area of some 1, 235,000 Km² it is the tenth largest country in Africa. The latest census registers the population to be more than 46 million thus



The Blue Nile falls

making Ethiopia the third most populous country in Africa. It has an 800 Kms long sea coast on the Red Sea and on land it is bordered by Sudan in the West, Kenya in the South and Somalia and Djibouti to the East.

Ethiopia is well-endowed with a balanced variety of flora and fauna. The central part of Ethiopia comprises a vast highland area astride the Rift Valley that forms a continuous contour from Lebanon in the North, through Ethiopia to Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique in the South. It is from this Ethiopian escarpment that the Blue Nile originates and flows to the Sudan and Egypt carrying billions of cubic meters of water and soil annually. Ethiopia has a generally temperate climate with uninterrupted sunshine throughout the year. The country has a dozen river systems including the Abbay (Blue Nile), the Awash, the Wabi Shebelle and the Ghenale, the Omo, the Tekeze, Baro, and Angeleb as well as several natural lakes.

Besides its stunningly beautiful natural landscape from the snow-covered Semien Mountains to the Danakil Depression, Ethiopia is also a reservoir of some of the rarest wildlife extant on the face of the earth. Some 103 species of mammals among which the Walia Ibex, the Semien red fox, the Mountain Nyala, the

Gelada Baboon, the Somali wild ass, the bushbuck and the hartbeest are endemic to Ethiopia.⁵ Likewise, some 835 species of birds are known to exist in Ethiopia, 26 of which are also endemic. To care for the survival of these mammals and birds Ethiopia has nine national parks, fourteen wildlife reserves and another fourteen protected hunting areas.

The peoples of Ethiopia represent an amalgam of African and Asian cultures and backgrounds richly blended over several millennia of the historical making of the country. In Homeric times Ethiopians were described as "loved by the gods ... and Jupiter leaves heavens and feasts with Adam because they are the justest of men."⁶ In the early years of the rise of Islam Prophet Mohammed is said to have sent his persecuted followers to take refuge in Ethiopia describing it as "a land of righteousness where God will give you relief from what you are suffering."⁷

Ethiopia is the melting-pot of Africa, where Asian and African as well as peoples of Judaic Christian, Muslim and Pantheist persuasions have coexisted in various forms for centuries. The Ethiopian people have always been known to be peace-loving and hospitable as well as freedom-loving and fiercely patriotic.



The obelisks of ancient Axum

Ethiopia in World History

Historically, the making of Ethiopia has been taking place over several millenia with different strands developing and fitting into the whole fabric at different periods of time. The more misty pre-christian era becomes sharper and more focussed when we find written documentation about Ethiopia such as, *The Periplus of the Eritrean Sea* and the growth of Nubia, Meroe and Aksum in the Horn of Africa at the threshold of the christian era.⁸ In fact, in the view of the well known African historian, Cheikh Anta Diop⁹

According to the unanimous testimony of the Ancients, first the Ethiopians and then the Egyptians created and raised to an extraordinary stage of development all the elements of civilization, while other peoples especially the Eurasians, were still deep in barbarism.

The historic Aksumite state of Ezana and Caleb had wide contacts and interactions with Byzantine and Arab polities of the day. Ethiopia's control of the source of the Blue Nile and of the Red Sea during this period also necessitated continuous political, economic and cultural contact with ancient Egypt. The med-

ieval period of Ethiopian history finds the epicenter of the Ethiopian polity shifting from the sea-coast towards the central highlands where in the crucible of regional territorial, religious and feudal struggles on the Horn, the framework of present-day Ethiopia was shaped.

After several centuries of local and regional feudal struggles and rivalries which witnessed also the involvement of distant powers like the Ottomans and the Portugese, we come to the nineteenth century and the period of imperialism. Nineteenth century Ethiopian history is replete with multisided struggles against European imperialists, regional expansionists and domestic feudal and nomadic elements by the Ethiopian masses. Within Ethiopia proper various feudal elements fought fiercely among themselves for supremacy even as they sought also to consolidate their rule against challenges from pastoral and semi-nomadic elements. At the same time regional expansionist forces represented mainly by Ottoman-Egyptians and Dervishes in the Sudan also carried out numerous raids and invasions on the Ethiopian state. Superimposed on these developments was the coming of imperialism to the Horn of Africa taking advantage of the internal and regional conflicts on the Horn and seeking to impose a colonial order.

Though chafing under the yoke of feudalism, the Ethiopian masses always rose in unison to fight against imperialism. Thus, Ethiopians rendered the 1886 British Napier Expedition (euphemism for Invasion) null and void. They fought and scored telling blows against the Italians of the day in Dogali in 1887, when the famous Ethiopian patriot Ras Alula had told all concerned that Ethiopia's boundary to the north was the Red Sea. In 1896 the

world witnessed the stunning Ethiopian victory over imperialism once again in the famous battle of Adowa, under Emperor Minilik wherein Ethiopia once more vindicated its independence.¹⁰

The Ethiopian state, meanwhile, had also been fighting against regional expansionist forces in the form of Ottoman-Egyptians and Sudanese Dervishes. In the course of these simultaneous struggles of the nineteenth



Ethiopian patriots: Headon confrontation with the fascist Italian invading Army.

century, Ethiopia's coastline was encroached, nibbled and gradually alienated. Landlocked and exhausted, Ethiopia had to come to terms with the British, French and Italian colonialists in 1897 with regard to the boundaries on the Horn. Once again, in 1935, Ethiopia was to be a victim of the brutal Fascist colonial invasion. The Ethiopian people's resolute and relentless protracted struggle led to the fascist's defeat and eviction in 1941.

The latest and most dramatic historical epoch in the struggle of the Ethiopian people against their class enemies to throw off the fetters to their development has been registered in 1974 when the popular revolution overthrew the decadent feudo-bourgeois regime and paved the way for the emergence of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Notwithstanding the oft-repeated opinion of Edward Gibbon: "Encompassed on all sides by the enemies of their religion, the Ethiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world by whom they were forgotten." Ethiopia has very much been part of world history contributing what it could and sustaining what came its way. Through Greek and Roman times to the Byzantine and Islamic eras, Ethiopia was very much on the scene interacting with the polities of

the day along the Nile valley and across the Red Sea. Ethiopian monks have been making their presence felt in the Christian holy places in Jerusalem since the 5th century A.D. and have had a permanent chapel, Dar-al-Sultan, there since 1189. The early contact between Ethiopia and the nascent Islamic movement in the Arabian peninsula was so harmonious that the Prophet is said to have admonished his followers to "Leave the Abyssinians (Ethiopians) alone -- so long as they do not take the offensive."¹¹

Ethiopia has been the object of curiosity and academic inquiry among European and Arab travellers and scholars. The studies and writings of the likes of Manoel de Almeida, Jerme Lobo, Francisco Alvarez, Job Ludolf, James Bruce, and V.A. Turaev as well as the works of Arab travellers and historians including those of al-Maqirzi, al Yaqubi, Ibn Batutta, Ibn Khaldun, al-Umari, and Chihab-ad Din attest to Ethiopia's place and role in world history. The identification of black peoples everywhere from New York to Kingston, from Accra to Zimbabwe as well as the green, yellow and red tricolour motif in most of the flags of independent African countries today are further testimony to the symbolic importance of Ethiopia to the black world. Within the country itself, the coins and stelae of Aksum, the rock-hewn

churches of Lalibela, the castles of Gonder, the walls of Harar, the shrine of Sheikh Hussein are living testaments to the richness, variety, longevity and continuity

of Ethiopia's civilization, a civilization which is currently being revitalized and rejuvenated in the ensuing revolutionary process.

Footnotes

1. Cf. Donald Johanson and Maitland Edey, *Lucy*, New York, 1982. For a review of the generic meaning of the term "Ethiopia" and its significance in ancient Greek and Roman times, see Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in Greco Roman Experience*, Cambridge, Mass. 1970.
2. For a review of Ethiopia's symbolic contribution to African Nationalism, see, for instance, S.K.B. Asante, *Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis (1934-1941)*, London, 1977
3. Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, London, 1981, (p.283).
4. Tsegaye Gebre Medhin and Alberto Tessoré, *Ethiopia: Footprint of Time*, Milano, 1984.
5. For a brief and colourful portrayal in words and pictures of the Ethiopian landscape and wildlife, see Ethiopian Tourism Commission, *Discovering Ethiopia*, London (no date) Cf. also G. Hancock, R. Pankhurst and D. Willets, *Under Ethiopian Skies*, London, (1983).
6. Cited in D. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, Chicago, 1974, P.4.
7. Cf. J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London, 1952, P.44.
8. For a review of ancient Ethiopian history, see E.A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia* (2 Vols.) London, 1928, Cf. also Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History*, Addis Ababa, 1972.
9. Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization. Myth or Reality?* Westport, 1974, p.230.
10. For a survey of Ethiopia's struggle for independence in the nineteenth century, see S. Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, London, 1976, Cf. also the author's article "Adwa: The Resounding Protest" in A. Mazrui and R. Rotberg (eds.) *Protest and Power in Black Africa*, New York, 1970.
11. Cf. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, op. cit., P.46.

CHAPTER II

THE DEFUNCT FEUDO-BOURGEOIS SYSTEM AND ITS LEGACIES

On the eve of the Popular Revolution in 1974, Ethiopia was, by all accounts and indicators, one of the most backward countries in the world, despite its long and continuous existence as an independent polity. Though its land, water and animal resources were such that it could have been the "bread-basket" of the whole region, it became a land of abject poverty¹, unable in fact even to save hundreds of thousands of its people from death by famine. Even though it was just about the only black African country with an extant script for hundreds of years and had a rich written cultural heritage, over 90% of its people were illiterate.

Despite the fact that it had maintained its independence for centuries withstanding successive waves of invasion by regional expansionist forces and by European colonialists, Ethiopia had become among the most vulnerable countries in the continent sustaining uninterrupted internal strife and facing imminent invasion from far and nearby hostile quarters by 1974.

What accounts for this paradoxical state of affairs, and what are the subjective and objective forces and factors that explain this phenomenon?

The correct way of understanding any social phenomena is to apprehend and appreciate the relations of production that characterizes a given socio-economic formation. Accordingly, it is the relations of production between the class that owns the means of production and the class that produces the society's wealth through necessary and surplus labour that reveals the basis and the superstructure of the society concerned. As Karl Marx, the genius who discovered and articulated the science of society, i.e. historical materialism² has said:

It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions (or means) of production to the direct producers ... which reveals the innermost secret, hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it ... of the corresponding specific form of state.

Historical Materialism posits that history has known primitive-communal, slave, feudal, and capitalist socio-economic formations, and since the beginning of this century, it is registering the unfolding of the communist mode of production that does away with class antagonisms by doing away with private ownership of the means of production. Each of these modes of production are governed by universal laws of emergence and development as well as transition from one stage to the next until classes disappear altogether. Hence the stage within which one finds a given society can be determined by a scientific class analysis of the predominant patterns of production relations between the forces of production and the owners of the means of production and the ensuing class contradictions and class struggles in all class systems.

Until the revolution of 1974 ushered in a new era, the Ethiopian economic-political-social system was predominantly feudal with incipient forms of capitalism superimposed on the feudal crust. *Inter alia*, feudalism is characterized as agrarian socio-economic system based on land as the principal instrument of

production and hence antagonistic production relations between the minority owners of the land as rulers and exploiters and the majority of the exploited and dominated population who are forced to labour as serfs, tenants or *gebbars*. Feudal economy is basically a subsistence economy based on production for use rather than for exchange. It exhibits low levels of technological and scientific development of the productive forces. Metaphysical attitudes are part of the dominant ethos of the ruling class which uses these factors to keep the exploited peasants in feudal society who were scattered throughout the land in such a way as to make it difficult for them to organize, raise their class consciousness and wage class struggles.³ The political superstructure, or the state is the "legal" instrument of class oppression and exploitation as in all class systems.

The question of feudalism in Ethiopia has generated some academic discussion since the revolution,⁴ but there is no doubt that Ethiopia has been a predominantly feudal society exhibiting both the universal characteristics and specific features of feudalism. In the northern regions of feu-

dal Ethiopia, land was apportioned for ownership by three categories of the landed gentry in accordance with a general formula of one-third (*sisso*) for the royalty, one-third for the aristocracy and one-third for the clergy. Each of these forms of land tenure had their own internal procedures of tenancy use by the peasant and the nature of tribute or corvée labour exacted from him by the landowning elements of the feudal system."

The feudal land tenure system in Ethiopia can be referred to as the *Gulteгна-Gebbar* system. The landlords were the *Gulteгна* class who, as vassals to the king or the emperor had various forms of *Gult* tenure such as *Semon* or church *gult*, *riste-gult* (hereditary) or *Maderya* (temporary), land etc... The *Gulteгна* combined political, military and administrative functions as needed, and as required by higher *Gulteгна* functionaries on the totem-pole. For that he exacted labour, tributary tithes, or military service from the *Gebbar* peasants who were dispossessed of their land and reduced to paying rent (*gebber*) to the landlords as tenants in exchange for the use of small portions of the land for their subsistence. For example, the powers and functions of one category of the *Gulteгна* has been described as follows:

The gulte-geji (governor or administrator) had wide powers and privileges. He maintained law and order, was generally entitled to a fifth of the produce of the peasant, and exacted Hudad (corvée labour) from the peasants... a peasant could work on the gulte-geji's tax-exempted land for ten days each year. There were also the multiple obligation or customary tribute and taxes... asrat (regular tax paid to the gulte-geji, fesses, and ye meslene abel (allowance paid to the bailiff of the gulte-geji which amounted to a tenth of the produce) and other customary tributes like ye amet beal gibir (tribute paid on public holidays).

The *Gulteгна* class had its own hierarchies and was called by different names in different parts of the country all the way from the *Emperor, King or Emir or Moti* at the top and *Melkeгна, Mislene, Shaleka, Balabat, Qoro, Malak, Abe Genda, to Chiqa-Shum* down the totem-pole. In one form or another, the *gebbar*

peasant paid tribute in cash, kind or service to these hierarchies of landlords or political deputies.

The feudal system's production relations, particularly in the North, was very complicated and varied from region to region. The *gebbar*, a tenant farmer, could eke out a bare existence for himself and his family as all his surplus labour and all his surplus product had to go to the *gultegna*s. He and his family were consigned for life to labour for the *Gultegna*s. The peasant could not even spend all of his time on his own tenant farms as he had to spend a considerable amount of time working on the *gultegna*

farms and the care of the *gultegna* cattles, as well as the building and guarding of the *gultegna* homes. The dictionary definition of the Amaharic word, *Gebbar* is:

*a farmer, a labourer, one who works compulsorily, one who proffers his labour and his money to his superior one who is at the disposal of authorities to do their bidding, indeed one who is "Balerist" slave.**

A closer view of one form of feudal production relations prevalent in the pre-revolutionary period in Gondar reveals some twenty types of feudal tithes exacted from the *gebbar* or tenant-farmer."

Chiqa Mar	—	Payment in honey for the appointed chief.
Tilosh Mar	—	Tax levied by a local chieftain on the population.
Asrat	---	One tenth of farm produce payment.
Milmil	--	One tenth of sheep and goat stock.
Amsho	—	One fifth for government land use.
Tis Chew	-	Tithe for fire-smoking.
Chiqa Qolo	—	the local chief's annual share of crops
Eere Chanqa	—	Grain payment in lieu of services.

Sar Chew	—	tithe for pasturing the tenant's cattle.
Gebbar Chew	—	Tax payment in the form of salt bars.
Zelan Geber	—	Poll-tax on stock breeding by pastoralists.
Amet Bal	—	Official holiday tithe
Mewaya		in the form of fattened sheep or cattle.
Dembegna	—	House and fence-building services for the local landlord.
Das Chew	—	Payment for setting up a tent for the wedding of the peasant's son or daughter.
Melmay Erat	—	Payment in cash for liaison functionary.
Tsehafi Asrat	—	One birr per church for clergy.
Mar Letsehafi	—	Payment for secular clerks.
Gulbet Eda	—	Punitive services performed in the premises of the local <i>Shaleka</i> landlord.
Silkegna		Periodic payments
Qeieb		to maintain the landlord's messengers.
Ber Kefach	—	Congratulatory tithe for the announcement of new appointments.

The difference in feudal production relations in the northern and the southern parts of the

country was one of form and of degree of intensity of exploitation rather than of substance.

Much of the southern regions of what was then known as the Ethiopian Empire experienced both indigenous (e.g. in Harar, Jimma, Wellega) forms of feudalism as well as feudal rule transplanted from the north. In many parts of the north, the *ristegna* peasant could be a freehold owner of small plots of land which he could bequeath to his heirs, but he remained a tenant farmer nonetheless, as we have seen in the foregoing paragraphs. In most parts of the south, the *Tissegna*

counterpart. It has been estimated that this form of *tisegna* tenancy was prevalent in some 8 of the 14 administrative regions of Ethiopia.¹⁰

Province	% of Tenancy
Arssi	52
Gamo goffa	48
Hararghe	54
Illubabor	75
Kaffa	62
Showa	67
Wellega	59
Wello	41



Members of the oppressed peasantry presenting petition in front of the then parliament building

peasant was completely dispossessed of his land and could only leasehold or have temporary tenancy to build his hut to smoke a fire in the home. The designation of *Chisegna* or *Tisegna* ... one who serves and pays tithes just for maintaining a hut to live in, and not even small plots of land to farm as his northern

The system of exploitation knew no geographical bounds and it was even legalized in the 1960 Civil Code. Articles 2990 and 2991 of that Civil Code which stipulated "unless otherwise provided by custom the rent (paid by the tenant) shall consist of *one half* of the agricul-

tural products of the land given on lease" and that "the share of the products due to the lessor may in no case exceed three-fourth." A 1973 world Bank *Agricultural Sector Survey* estimated that in 9 regions the mode of payment by peasants for land rent in the 1960's was 48.8% in crops; 43.4% in cash; 6.2% in crops and cash, and 1.6% in services. In addition to these levies imposed on the already impoverished peasant, was also the small size of land under cultivation and fragmentation in the agricultural sector. The tenant farmer had no security of tenure as he could be evicted at the landlord's whim. Absentee landlordism was also on the increase after the 1935-41 fascist invasion. Furthermore, the land under cultivation was often so small that it was not conducive for productive use. Thus, it is noted that out of a total of 3,118,914 holdings in 9 regions 95% of them were three hectares or less. The economic consequences and development fetters that such a state of affairs inevitably led to was frankly admitted by the economists of the day who framed the 1968-1973 *Third Five Year Development Plan*¹¹ in which they said:

Out of four million pea-

*sant households, 90% cultivate less than five hectares each, two thirds of them less than 1½ hectares. The existing systems of land tenure further reduce the number of economically viable farms and the combination of these results in the low productivity, the low savings capacity, and the low standard of living of the masses of the people. These factors in turn reinforce the low productivity because neither the means nor motives exist for increasing output.*¹¹

Though too scattered to wage an organized and sustained struggle against his oppressors and exploiters, the peasantry nonetheless carried out a once open and a once hidden class struggle continuously. Peasants in Bale, Gojam, Hararge, and Tigray openly rose in rebellion against the regime intermittently.¹² Each class in feudal Ethiopia also expressed its attitudes in proverbial sayings and songs. Thus, whereas the landlords had sayings like:

“ደግ የሚበላው እንጂ የሚከፋለው አያለም”

“The poor may not have enough to eat but they will surely have enough to pay (as tribute)”

the peasants had their blues like:

“ኹመኔን ቀንተሽ ጥራውን በላውት፡ እንዳለበስለውም የጤሱን ፈራሁት”

*"I plucked my cabbage
and ate it raw, for fear of the
smoke (tax) if I were to cook
it"*

Needless to say, politically the peasant was completely disenfranchised and trampled upon by the feudal absolutist rulers and their coteries. Socially, the chasm between the landlord class and the peasantry was very wide, and hence the attendant social contradictions. Especially women suffered untold indignities in feudal Ethiopia. Among the sayings debasing the women were found some like:

"የሴት አእምሮች የጅብ ቀንደኛ የለውም"

*"One cannot find a female
with brains or a hyena with
horns"*

Certain nationalities, especially in the periphery of the empire were despised, neglected and alienated.

The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the penetration of foreign capital into Ethiopia and the rudimentary commodity production superimposed on the hard crust of the feudal mode of production. The net result of this slow and gradual penetration of capital into Ethiopia was on the one hand, "a definite decline rather than a tangible

development in the country's economy" and, on the other hand, the relegation of the working class to, "severe oppression and exploitation."¹³

In the 50's and 60's this development was accelerated aided and abetted by the feudal regime's open door investment policies which became "steadily more favourable to foreign capital".¹⁴ Inexorably, this unholy alliance between feudalism and capitalism in Ethiopia, with its burgeoning coteries of comprador and bureaucratic bourgeoisie resulted in the emergence of the working class. Towards the end of the 60's and early 70's these new bourgeois social vultures were roosting to cast their nets of exploitation in the cities and the countryside as well.

The new petty comprador and bureaucratic bourgeoisie in Ethiopia in tandem with the leading feudal elements from whose bosom they sprang, carried on an intensified process of dispossessing the peasantry in the countryside and thus evicting the peasant and/or the pastoralist from his land so that they can establish mechanized farming and then monopolizing urban land to build villas with the surplus they accumulated from the countryside. It has been estimated, for

instance, that on the eve of the revolution in 1974, some 60 aristocrats, royalists and related petty bourgeois elements laid claim to urban land in Addis Ababa alone that could have accommodated more than half a million people at 500 sq. meters per head.¹⁵

Though numerically small and with extremely limited possibilities to develop its political consciousness, the working class was coming of age in the late 50's and early 60's and labour union struggle surfaced first with railway workers in Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa and also among workers in Eritrea who had chafed under intensive capitalist exploitation for a much longer period than their counterparts in the rest of Ethiopia. Under the pressures of the International Labour Organization (ILO), and as a way of posing as being at par with modernity, the feudo – bourgeois regime with the connivance and support of international imperialism created what it called the "Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions" or CELU in 1963, which was to work on the principle of collaboration with the monopolists. The rank and file of the working class carried on their struggle. The peasantry also staged massive resistance and rebellion in several regions. The youth also agitated against the obsolescent feudo – bourgeois regime under the slogan of "Land to the Tiller".

By 1974, Ethiopia was one of

the very poor countries in the world with one of the lowest GNP per capita, one of the highest illiteracy rates, with more than 90% of its economy stagnating in subsistence agriculture, and with an infant mortality rate of 200 of every 1000 births.¹⁶

The contradictions between the productive forces and the feudal production relations had reached their limit and the objective conditions for revolution had obtained in Ethiopia by 1974. The 1973 – 74 famine (or "hidden hunger" as it was called) which claimed the lives of some 200,000 people exposed the utter decadence and bankruptcy of the system that was done away with by the February 1974 popular revolution. One courtier behind the scenes is quoted as having described the state of mind in the acupuncture nerve center of the *ancien regime* as follows:¹⁷

The last year: Yes; but who then could have foreseen that 1974 could be our last year? Well, yes one did feel a sort of vagueness, a melancholy chaotic ineptness, a certain negativity, something heavy in the air, nervousness and tension, flabbiness, now dawning, now growing dark, but how did we go so quickly straight into the abyss? That is it? No more? You can look but no more palace. You seek, but you do not find. You ask, but no one can answer.

FOOTNOTES

1. One writer describes the state of Ethiopian poverty by noting that "Ethiopia's 1973 per capita GNP of U.S. \$90 (Eth. Birr 203) placed it 134th among 145 countries of the world". Philip Le Bel "Economic and social indicators as predictors of the Ethiopian Revolution of 1975 (sic)" in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, Chicago, 1978, pp. 761 – 770.
2. Cf. K. Marx *Capital*, Vol. III, Moscow 1959, p. 772.
3. See, for instance, Marx's classic anatomy of the peasantry in France, "*Class Struggles in France in Selected Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1976, pp. 175 – 300.
4. For a sampling of the burgeoning debate on feudalism in Ethiopia see, for instance, Negussay Ayele, "Is there Feudalism in Ethiopia? A paper presented on the *Conference on Ethiopian Feudalism*, A.A.U., 1976, Gene Ellis. "The Feudal Paradigm as a Hindrance to Understanding Ethiopia" *Journal of Modern African Studies*, V. 14, 2(1976) and Legesse Lemma's review in *Ethio-*
pianist Notes 2, (1978).
5. Theoretically, in fact, land was supposed to belong to the king or Emperor but in practice the *Sisso* system was applied. The Northern provinces where the *Sisso* system of tenure prevailed, comprised of Tigray, Eritrea, Gojam, Gondar as well as parts of Shewa and of Wello.
6. See "Modes of Production and Class Analysis in Ethiopia" *Challenge* Vol. XII, No. 1 (1971), Cf. also Addis Hiwot, *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution*, London, (1975)
7. Addis Hiwot, *Ibid.*, p. 28. Cf. also R. Pankhurst, *State and Land in Ethiopian History*, (A.A., 1966); Balanbaras Mahteme Selassie Wolde Meskel, *Zikre Neger*, (Amharic) 1942. Eth. Cal. pp. 109 – 176; Joana Montel Niecko, *The Role of Land Tenure in the System of Ethiopian Imperial Government in Modern Times*, Warsaw, 1980; S. Pausewang, *Peasants, Land and Society – Ethiopia*, Munchen, 1983.
8. See ኪዳነወልድ ክፋሌ ፡ ሙጺሐፈ ሰዋሰው ውግስ ወመዝገበ ታላቅ ሐጺስ ።

The Amharic rendition for the word ገብር is “ገበሬ : ሠራተኛ : በግድ የሚሠራ : ጉልበቱን ገንዘቡን ለሹም የሚያፈስ : ሹማምንት እንደወ ደዱ የሚያደርጉት : ባለርስት ባሪያ ።”

9. Cited in Negussay Ayele, “The Ethiopian Revolution” *UFAHAMU*, Vol. XII, No.3 (1983), p.41. For a comparative review of feudalism in the North and the South, see John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*, A.A., 1975, pp. 73 – 140. Cf. also P. Gilkes, *The Dying Lion*, London, 1975, pp. 101 – 137. J.M Cohen & D. Weintraub, *Land and Peasants in Imperial Ethiopia*, Assen, 1975, Cf. also “The Distinctive Features of Feudalism in Ethiopia,” in *Meskerem*, Part I Vol. I, No.5 and Part II, Vol, II, No. 7.
10. Ministry of Agriculture and Settlement, *Measures for Rural Transformation*, 1978, p.5.
11. See Imperial Ethiopian Government, *3rd Five Year Plan*. A.A., 1968, p.190.
12. Gilkes, *The Dying Lion*, Loc. Cit., p. 121.
13. “The Ethiopian Working Class Yesterday and Today”. *Meskerem*, Vol. III, No. 13, p.46.
14. See Gilkes, *op. cit.*, p. 150, Cf. also L. Bondestam “Notes on Multinational Corporations in Ethiopia”, *The African Review*, Vol.5, No. 4, pp. 535 – 549.
15. This estimate is based on public disclosures on the state of urban land holding following the July 26, 1975 Nationalization of Urban Land and Extra Houses.
16. See Phillip Le Bel: “Economic and Social Indicators as predictors of the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974,” *op. cit.*, pp. 761 and ff. see also G. Galperin, *Ethiopia*, Progress Publishers, 1981, p. 15, and Negussay Ayele, “The Ethiopian Revolution: Seven Years young”. *op. cit.*, p.50 and ff.
17. See Ryszard Kapuscinski, *The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat*, N.Y., 1983, p. 120.

CHAPTER III

BIRTH OF THE REVOLUTION

It is axiomatic that all social revolutions entail a profound and qualitative change in the life and development of all societies. Based as they are on the immanent contradictions built up between the forces of production on the one hand, and the relations of production on the other, they take place as a result of a long and protracted struggle between the exploiting few and the exploited majority.

Though the process is long and quite involved, the oppressed majority, initially express their resentment and indignation over their miserable social conditions in an isolated and spontaneous manner. However, as time goes by the struggle of the oppressed begins to gain momentum both in scope and dimension, resulting in a concerted refusal by them to continue in their subjugation as before. Those who are on the saddle of political power too, having lost all their material and moral strength to keep their subjects under their oppressive rule begin to lose their grip on the social order they had maintained for so long. Thus the old relations of production put asunder by the ever growing revolutionary momentum of the masses begins to crumble and gives way to a new and

dynamic relations of production, correspondingly reflecting the political and economic interests of the new and emerging revolutionary forces of the society.

This is exactly what took place in feudal Ethiopia in February 1974. The feudal social formation that had reigned supreme in Ethiopia for so long, and which was solely responsible for the country's total backwardness was shattered to its very foundation under the revolutionary weight of the masses.

A very keen political observer, who wrote about the circumstances in which the Ethiopian revolution took place in February, 1974 commented:¹

Poverty; the absence of civil rights, the decline of economic growth and rampant inflation could not but create a critical pre-revolutionary situation, aggravated by astronomical price increase, unemployment, lumpenization of the section of the urban population and mass exodus of peasants to the cities. To these problems were added the catastrophic consequences of a drought lasting several years, and the increasing arbitrary rule of official-

dom. By 1974, the socio-economic and political contrasts between the ruling feudal aristocracy on the one hand, and the oppressed masses on the other, had reached their limit. Discontent and mass unrest was mushrooming everywhere.

and all the oppressed strata of the society rose up in revolt throughout the country, and shook the despotic rule of Haile Selassie to its very foundation.

The Feudo-bourgeois regime of Haile Selassie, caught unawares by the revolutionary uprising of



Emergence of the coordinating committee of the Armed Forces, police and Territorial Army under the slogan of "Ethiopia Tikdem".

The cumulative struggle that the Ethiopian people had waged over the centuries burst out as a throughgoing revolution in February, 1974, as a result of the irreconcilable contradictions which developed between the productive forces on the one hand, and the archaic feudal relations of production on the other. Workers, peasants, students, soldiers

the masses began buckling, and in the hope of arresting the revolutionary momentum of the masses, dissolved the bankrupt cabinet of prime minister Aklilu Habte-Wold and replaced it by a new one, headed by another feudal aristocrat, Endalkachew Mekonnen, who made a number of reform promises, including a new constitution. Still unable to

comprehend that the Ethiopian people wanted fundamental social change and not sham reform, the feudal aristocrats attempted to subvert the revolutionary movement of the masses by resorting to their classic tactic of divide and rule. In this regard, the most serious danger that faced the revolutionary movement of the masses was the reformist line advocated by Endalkachew Mekonnen. This die-hard feudal aristocrat relishing the fact that the popular uprising had not as yet developed an organized political leadership, and presuming that the issuance of a new constitution would satisfy the radical social change demanded by the people, commissioned a Committee that would draft a new constitution. Moreover indulging in his own spurious imagination that the democratic rights that the masses had won through their struggle were his own gifts he called upon, the Ethiopian people to give a new lease of life to his so-called reformist regime. He even attempted to give the impression that the members of his new cabinet would be accountable not to the aged and brittle emperor, but to himself. To further confuse the people, and hence to side-track them from following their revolutionary course of action he issued a white paper that purported to outline the goal and policy of his government. Included in his white paper was the issue of land reform, an issue which for a long

time had been the burning question of the Ethiopian Revolution. But the deceitful nature of Endalkachew's land reform policy was revealed soon, because the very people who were supposed to implement the land reform policy were none other than the feudal oligarchs who were the very target of the revolution.²

Before the feudal aristocrats and particularly their chief spokesman, Endalkachew, could succeed in subverting the revolutionary uprising of the masses, the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, the Police and the Territorial Army which was formed on June 28, 1974 began assuming the leadership of the revolution.

In politics, and particularly in revolutionary politics, the fundamental issue of the struggle always revolves around the question of state power. And as the experiences of revolutionary struggle clearly corroborate, this question is definitely resolved in favor of the masses only when state power is transferred from the hands of the reactionary classes to those of the progressive forces who represent the interest of the toiling majority.³

The Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, the Police and the Territorial Army, which appreciated the significance of this principle of revolutionary politics, by rapidly taking timely



The masses of the people in support of the Revolution and the territorial integrity of the country.

and successive political moves, not only succeeded in neutralizing the various conspiracies that the feudal oligarchies were hatching against the revolutionary uprising of the masses but also facilitated the grounds for the eventual demolishing of the archaic feudal political and economic structures that had reigned supreme in Ethiopia for centuries. It worked skillfully to weaken the position of the Emperor, and to lure all the feudal oligarchs and other agents of imperialism to house arrest and political custody. Once all the necessary grounds were laid, the Committee took the most logical and decisive decision, namely the deposing of the feudal Emperor and the assumption of state power on behalf of the down-trod-

den masses. Hence, on September 12, 1974 Haile Selassie, who used to claim to being the 225 th monarch in a succession of the so-called "Solomonic Dynasty" was deposed, and with his overthrow, political power, for the first time in the long and checkered history of the Ethiopian people passed from emperors, kings, princes and nobles into the hands of the genuine representatives of the toiling masses. And with this, Ethiopia ceased once and for all to be a "hidden empire" and a "romantic paradise" of feudal princes and aristocrats; instead, it became a land with prospects for true freedom, equality, respect, and initiative for the overwhelming majority.⁴

Footnotes

1. For details, see Ethiopia: *A Decade of Revolutionary Transformation: 1974-1984*: Addis Ababa, 1984, pp 23 - 24

2. For the background of the Ethiopian Revolution, see *Ethiopia: Four Years of Revolutionary Struggle*. Addis Ababa, 1978, PP.19-21

3. See also the *Central Report* delivered by Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam to the First Cong-

ress of the Commission For Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE), Addis Ababa, June, 1980. Cf. also Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam's *Central Report to the Founding Congress of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia*, Sept, 1984, Addis Ababa.

4. Op. Cit; *Ethiopia: Four Years of Revolutionary Struggle*, PP. 20-21

CHAPTER IV

ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF THE REVOLUTION

The popular Ethiopian Revolution, described by observers as "Africa's First Major Social Revolution"¹ has, in the past 13 years, registered significant achievements in the economic, political, social and cultural fields. Its achievements were scored in the face of considerable internal and external counter-revolutionary challenges and thus entailing heavy sacrifices.

The first and foremost fundamental economic achievement of the Revolution is the March, 1975 "Proclamation to provide for the Public Ownership of Rural Lands", which was quickly followed in July 1975, with the Nationalization of Urban Lands and Extra Houses".² This sweeping Proclamation ended centuries of feudal exploitation of the Ethiopian peasantry and made the long sought-after objectives of "Land to the Tiller", which for many years had been the clarion call of the country's young progressives an irreversible reality. Politically, this revolutionary measure was a fatal blow that shattered the spine of the feudal superstructure and mobilized the rural masses as well as the urban poor behind the Revolution and its progressive leadership. The March 1975 Proclama-

tion also provided the basis for the politicization and organization of the Ethiopian peasantry through Peasants' Associations to work better and to increase both individual and collective productivity for national development. To date, some seven million peasants are organized in more than 20,000 associations throughout the country. The Revolutionary Government has also embarked upon a voluntary, but systematic villagization programme in rural Ethiopia whereby the rural population will be disposed to produce better, to share in the fruits of its labour, and also to receive such social services as schooling, clean water, transportation, etc. rendered by the government more easily. To date, some 1,138,265 houses have been constructed in 5,176 villages and a total of over 8 million peasants have been regrouped in the new villages.³

In the social field, the Ethiopian Revolution has also made impressive strides as well, particularly in educational development. Though much more remains to be done yet in the educational sphere, what has been achieved during the revolutionary period is very impressive indeed as shown in the table below

Educational Growth (1974-1987)⁴

	Grades	1974	1983
Students	1 - 6	859,000	2,729,200
	7 - 8	101,800	424,500
	9 - 12	82,300	326,000
Teachers	1 - 6	18,600	55,037
	7 - 8	3,200	8,438
	9 - 12	3,000	8,720
Schools	1 - 6	2,754	8,261
	7 - 8	420	1,001
	9 - 12	112	260

In similar vein in the 1973-74 academic year, there were 8,151 students enrolled in higher educa-

tion institutions. By 1987, the number has risen to nearly 28,000.

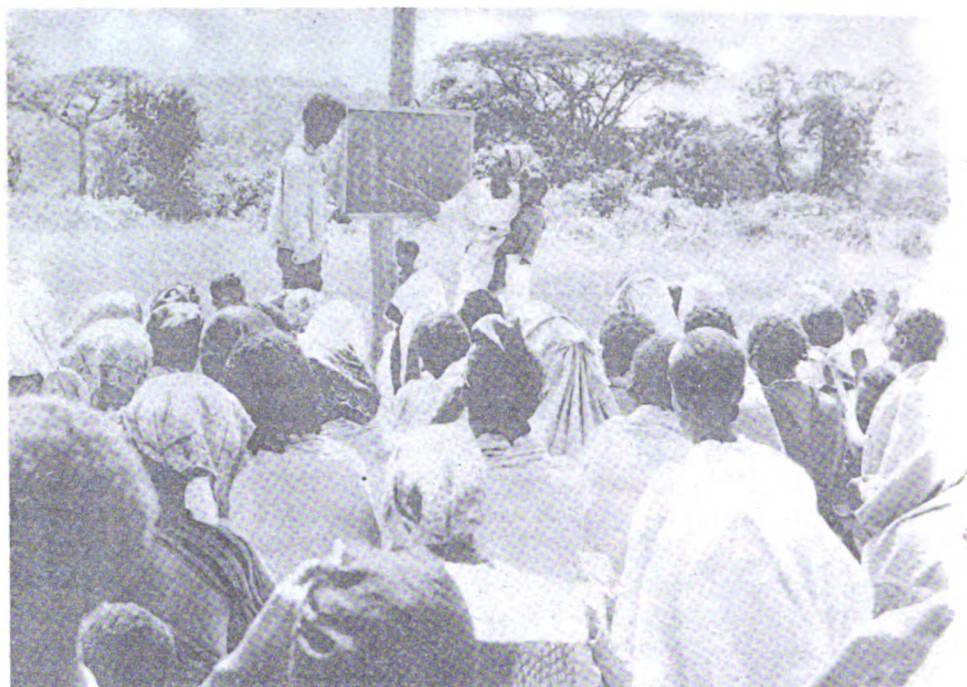
One of the most dramatic achievements scored in the Revolutionary period is in the field of eradicating illiteracy. At the outset of the Revolution, the illiteracy rate had stood at 93%. In less than four years of committed and efficient literacy campaign, the illiteracy rate was reduced by 1984 to as low as 37%, and this world-acclaimed Ethiopian literacy campaign continues and it will not be very long before the country achieves total literacy. The literacy campaign itself is being conducted in 15 different



The masses of the people expressing their support to the historic land proclamation



Terracing is extensively being carried out all over the country



A Literacy lesson being conducted in an open air

languages throughout the country.

Likewise, health facilities which reached barely 15% of the population before the revolution, today reach more than 50% of the population.

In the field of cultural development, Revolutionary Ethiopia has also made many strides. Chief among these are the separation of state and church and thereby eliminating once and for all the built-in bias of the state in favour of one religion at the expense of the others and also enhancing the development of secular and scientific thought in the country. Thus, today in revolutionary Ethiopia there exists religious freedom and equality while important Muslim as well as Christian holidays are publicly celebrated. The constitution of the PDRE guarantees religious freedom and equality (Articles 35 and 45).

Whereas, in pre-revolutionary Ethiopia, politics was the exclusive domain of the ruling elites of the royalty, aristocracy and the clergy, in Revolutionary Ethiopia, politics belongs to the people, to the masses, to all the working people of the country. Early in the revolutionary process, it was resolved by the Revolutionary Government that the people shall assume state power after having undergone through a systematic process of raising their political

consciousness, and after elevating their organizational and mobilizational acumen and self-defence capabilities. For the past 13 years of the Revolution, the Ethiopian working masses have been doing just that by organizing appropriate political forums.

Of the series of achievements that the Revolution has made in

was organized in 1977 and today it has a membership of over 300,000. With the guiding hand of the party and with the aid of appropriate state legislation, the ETU is currently one of the strongest mass organizations, representing the working class and safeguarding and enhancing the revolutionary momentum.

Against a history of total neglect



Ethiopian folklore Dancers on stage

the sphere of politics, the major one has been in the area of mobilizing and politicizing the masses and enabling the working people to assume increasing responsibilities in self-rule. To that end, the Ethiopian Trade Union (ETU),

and political oblivion to which millions of Ethiopian peasants were relegated by the defunct feudo-bourgeois regime, today thanks to the Revolution, more than seven million of them are organized in some 20 thousand



Builders and defenders of tomorrow's socialist motherland

Peasants' Associations throughout the length and breadth of Revolutionary Ethiopia within the Ethiopian Peasants' Association (EPA). Today, some 458,174 peasants serve as elected officials in the EPA.⁵

By 1980, the Revolutionary Ethiopia Youth Association (REYA) was established to mobilize Ethiopia's Youth aged 14 to 30 to apprentice itself for greater calls and responsibilities in the future. Accordingly, REYA today claims a membership of over four million youths in the country with more than 453,000 elected representatives. Already,

REYA's youthful vigour is being reflected in many developmental projects as well as in the National Military Service. REYA, REWA, ETU, EPA are also developing links of solidarity with counterpart organizations all over the progressive world.

The women of Ethiopia, who for centuries chafed under the oppressive and discriminatory feudal system have come a long way towards remedying the indignities of the past and creating a more secure future of equality and self-esteem. To that end, the Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association (REWA), was organi-



Participants of the first congress of REWA

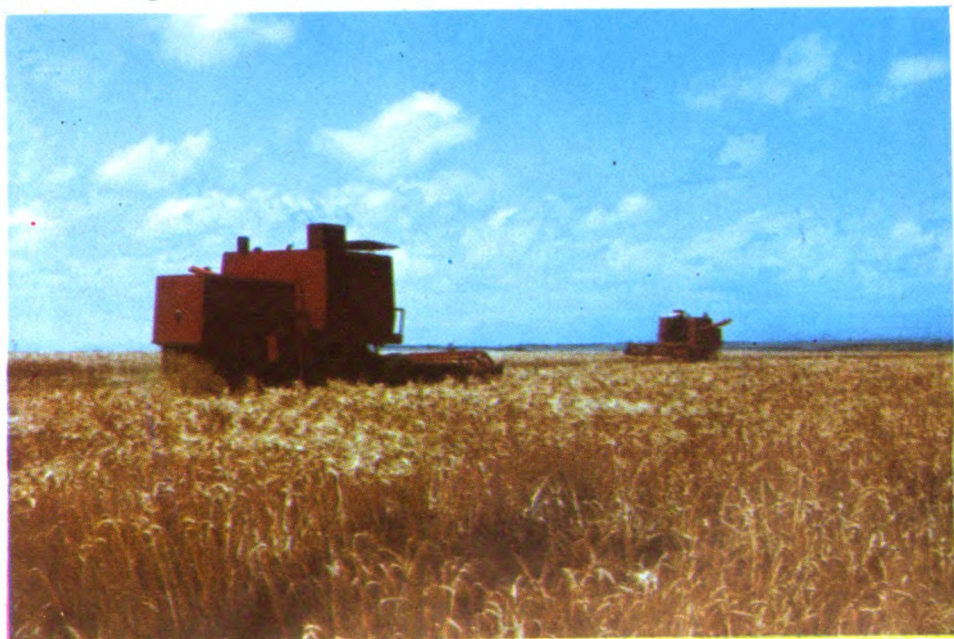
zed in 1980 and by 1984 it boasted a five million strong membership with some 309,128 elected officials of the Association. Like EPA, REYA and the other mass organizations, REWA is also forging and strengthening a world wide network of solidarity with progressive mass organizations throughout the world.

The 1975 urban lands and extra houses nationalization proclamation was complemented by the establishment of the Urban Dwellers' Associations (UDA's), better known as the *Kebeles*. The *Kebeles* as well as all mass organizations played a very important role in organizing the urban dwellers to rally behind the Revolution to repulse the Somali inva-

sion of 1977. Thus today it is difficult to find any adult Ethiopian who does not belong to one or the other of these mass organizations that have emerged in the crucible of the revolution.

In the economic sphere too a lot has been accomplished in the last 13 years of revolutionary struggle to liberate the productive forces of the country from the archaic feudal production relations, and therefore to facilitate the ground for laying down the technical and material basis for the building of a socialist economy.

Since agriculture is the basis of Revolutionary Ethiopia's economy, to accelerate the rate of development of this sector of the



Wheat being harvested

economy and thereby to raise the productivity of the peasantry, a priority attention has been given by the revolutionary government to this sector. Extensive efforts have been made to widely distribute fertilizers, improved seeds, pesticides, modern farm tools and equipment as well as other associated services to the peasantry. Together with these measures, other steps have also been taken to strengthen the advice offered to the peasantry on methods of farm work and production management through extensive training of agricultural specialists. A number of training centers like that of Agarfa and the Yekatit 25 Cooperatives Institute of Ardiata, whose objective is to impart knowledge of modern agriculture and farm techniques to the peasantry have also been established.

Moves have also been taken to transform agriculture along the socialist path of development. According to official data, there are 20,000 peasants' associations, over 4,000 service rendering cooperatives and about 2,323 agricultural producer's cooperatives in the country todate.

Another measure, which has been taken by the Revolutionary Government to accelerate the development of the agricultural sector of the economy, has been the expansion and consolidation of state farms, with agricultural

plantations and estates taken over from former capitalists serving as starting points. While the nationalized modern farms totall ed 72,000 hectares, today land under state farms has risen to over 300,000 hectares."

Since the building of a socialist economy presupposes among other things, a highly modernized form of agricultural production by cooperatives and large-scale state farms, a lot is being done in this regard to enable the Ethiopian peasantry to base their livelihood on a secure and guaranteed foundation by way of helping them to increase agricultural production. The expansion of cooperatives and state farms play an important role in promoting modern farming by way of showing the peasantry the advantages of using machines and social labour.

In the sphere of industry too, with the nationalization of the major means of production and distribution that freed the Ethiopian Working Class from capitalist exploitation, a rational reorganization of the sector has taken place with the view to develop the industrial base of the country comprehensively. Towards this end, not only those industrial establishments that were destroyed by the secessionists in the north and by the Somali aggressors were reconstructed and had been made to operate at full capa-



The Muger Cement Factory

city, but new industries in such fields as textile, cement, production of agricultural machineries, etc have been commissioned.

In the field of energy, large-scale hydro-electric schemes have been underway. The Melka Wakena and the Gibe hydroelectric complexes, being built with the assistance of the fraternal socialist countries and whose expected annual energy output of 152 and 300 mega watts respectively are near completion. In the mining sector of the economy an extensive geological survey is currently being undertaken with the objective of identifying the types and quantity of the mineral

resources that Ethiopia has. The geological surveys that have been undertaken so far, indicate that Ethiopia has a considerable reserve of iron ore, natural gas and oil, gold, lignite, nickel, platinum, tantalum etc. In addition, in the last 13 years of struggle, the results registered in the spheres of transport and communication, in laying down various types of infrastructures for the overall development of the economy, in housing, in trade as well as in the production and distribution of essential consumer goods for the satisfaction of the basic needs of the masses of the people are quite considerable.

To revamp the whole economy and to map out a proper strategy for its rational development, not only the principle of central planning has been introduced into the working of the economy, but also a ten-year perspective plan has been launched. The Ten-Year Perspective Plan, approved by the Founding Congress of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia in September, 1984, and based on the Program of the WPE, envisages the completion of the National Democratic Revolution, and has as its fundamental objective the creation of the requisite material, technical and cultural basis for socialist construction. In accordance with the social and economic development priorities of the WPE, the core of the Ten-Year Perspective Plan is the acceleration of the development of agriculture and the attainment of a major stride within the context of the comprehensive activities that the Revolutionary Government has initiated to change the face of rural Ethiopia.

To realize this objective, the plan calls for the modernization of agriculture, first of all expanding the acreage of state farms and by organizing the peasantry into producers cooperatives, and by providing them with such essential agricultural technologies as fertilizers, improved seeds, pesticides, tractors as well as a network of extensive agricultural extension services. To

increase the productivity of agriculture it is also envisaged that a series of agricultural training and research centers that will provide the peasantry both with a modern technique of farming and up-to-date agricultural research findings will be established throughout the country. In this scheme, a prominent place also has been given for the development of irrigation agriculture, for afforestation and for the maintenance of the ecological balance of the country.

As noted by our Revolutionary leader, Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, in the industrial sphere attention will be given to the development of heavy industry and "with this in view, by the end of the plan period, the share of non-ferrous metals, chemicals, and iron and steel industries, in the total industrial output of the country is expected to increase from 19% to 46%."

In addition, to increase the industrial development of the country it is planned that 216 new industrial projects will become operational during the plan period. Of these, fifty two will represent expansion of existing units, while 164 will be completely new establishments. The mining sector of the economy too will be given due attention.⁷ During the plan period, it is expected that while 52% of the country's total area will be surveyed, 69

projects related to the research and exploitation of minerals will be launched.

In addition, during the plan period, it is envisaged that a series of measures will be undertaken in such spheres as transport and communication, road building, construction, internal and external trade, education, health, etc so as to increase the capacity of the country in meet-

It is to be recalled that when the revolution began demolishing the feudal socio-economic structure and started charting a new course of development, all those reactionary elements whose basic socio-economic interests were fundamentally affected, began to attack the revolution in all directions. Secessionists in the North, taking advantage of the situation prevailing in the



The Newly Constructed Bridge on the Baro River in Gambela Province

ing the social needs and well-being of the masses of the people.

All this has been carried out as Revolutionary Ethiopia has had to fight against foreign invasion, internal counter-revolutionaries and secessionists and natural calamities in the form of drought and famine in the country.

country, began to openly challenge the revolution and to bring the administrative region of Eritrea, part of the cradle of Ethiopia's historic civilization, under the influence of international imperialism and Arab reaction. The expansionist Somali Regime too, believing that conditions for

realizing its dream of "Greater Somalia" were ripe, mobilized all the resources and forces at its disposal to annex the eastern and southern regions of Ethiopia. It is to be recalled that during the height of the war, in 1977-1978, the invading army of Somalia had overrun an area of 700 Kilometers in Eastern Ethiopia and 200 Kilometers in South-eastern Ethiopia. These were not the only enemies that the Ethiopian Revolution had to fight against. There were also the so-called Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), an offshoot of the overthrown feudal aristocracy, and the so-called Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), an anarcho-fascist element of the petty-bourgeoisie, that were engaged in creating havoc and wanton destruction both in the countryside and in the cities. The Revolution had therefore to simultaneously struggle both to fend off the attack of the forces of the internal counter-revolution and to repulse the naked Somali aggression. The defensive forces of Revolutionary Ethiopia assisted by the fraternal Socialist countries, and organized and deployed rapidly under the motto of "Revolutionary Motherland or Death", administered a shattering defeat to the invading army of Somalia in March, 1978. Following this crushing defeat, the invading troops of Mogadishou, fearing that they would be

totally annihilated by the victorious army of Revolutionary Ethiopia ran away abandoning all weaponry they had brought from Somalia. Likewise all those internal counter-revolutionary elements, who were disturbing the peace and tranquillity of the masses of the people were brought under control.

As the Somali aggressors and the internal counter-revolutionary elements were defeated, international imperialism and its regional surrogates began concentrating their efforts in aiding the secessionists in the north, with the view of derailing the Ethiopian Revolution. The circumstances that enabled the secessionists to hold a sizeable portion of the administrative region of Eritrea during the critical period of the Revolution prompted international imperialism to come up with an arrogant position that suggested to Revolutionary Ethiopia to choose either her revolution or her territorial integrity. Needless to say the response given by Ethiopia and her revolutionary leadership to this sinister challenge was that neither her Revolution nor any part of her territory would ever be a subject for negotiation.

It was therefore in response to this blatant challenge that the Second Army of Liberation was deployed in the region with the objective of asserting the irre-

versible position of the Revolution, and to liberate the oppressed masses of the region who had been subjected to all types of harassment and hardship by the secessionists. Furthermore, the deployment of the liberation army in the region anticipated the eradication of all types of obstacles to the prevalence of peace and social progress that had been prevailing in the region

supported by the broad masses of the region, launched a decisive offensive against the secessionists and within a short spell of time scored a resounding victory over the hired thugs of imperialism and reaction. Thus today, with the immense sacrifice paid by the Revolutionary Army, all those towns and villages, in the administrative region of Eritrea, which were once exposed to all



The Revolutionary Army always on the Alert to defend the frontier of the motherland

from the dawn of European colonialism to the present. Thus, the Liberation Army, organizing itself in different task forces, and

types of hardship are beginning to become centers of development and construction. Particularly with the Red Star Revolution

tionary Campaign, whose main objective has been to reconstruct the economic and social life of the masses of the region that had been wantonly destroyed by the diehard secessionists, a strong

foundation is being laid down, by way of bringing about a stable and peaceful living conditions for the masses of the people in the region.



Samples of the resettlement areas and new villages being built by peasants in rural Ethiopia.

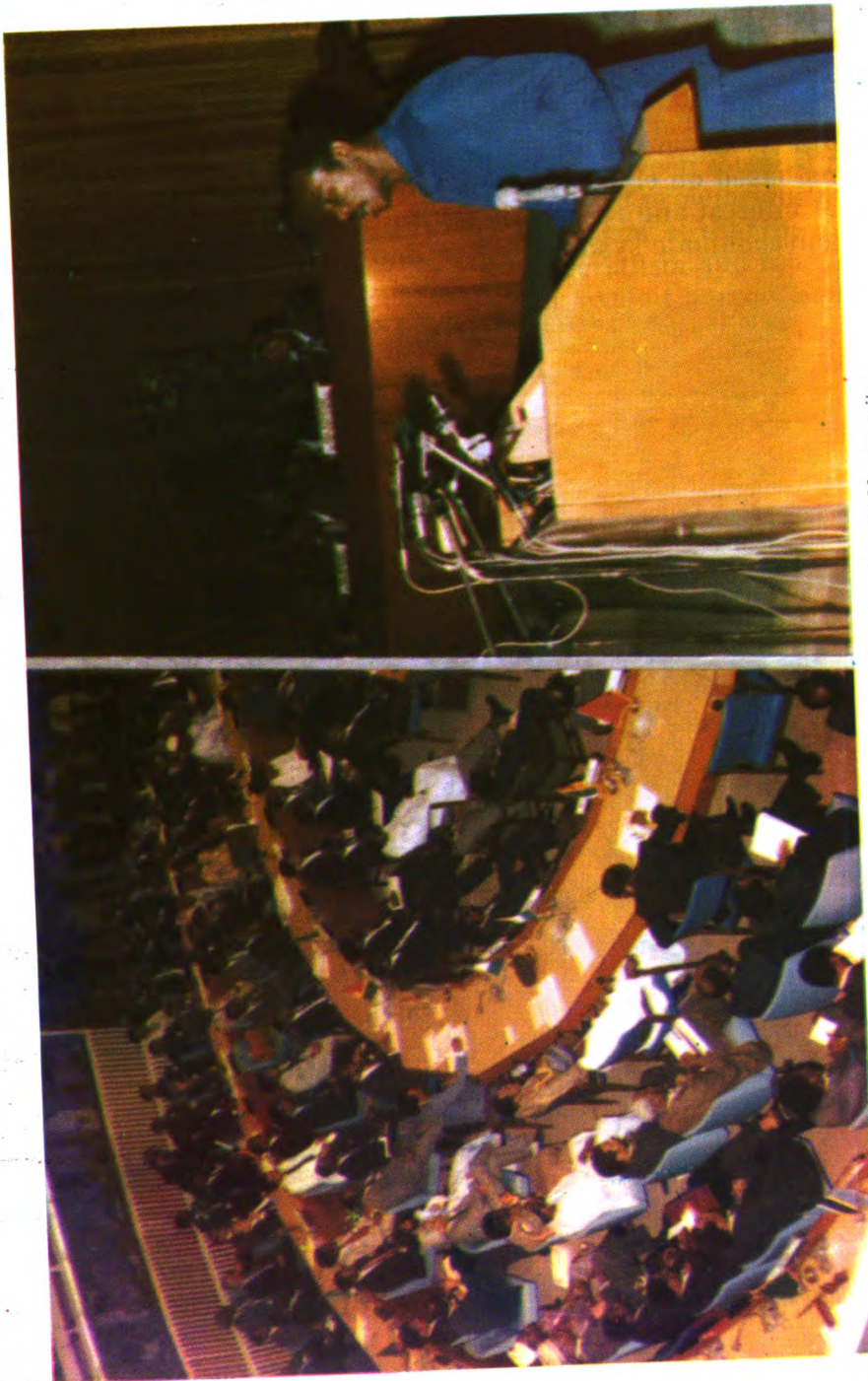
Perhaps one of the better examples of our revolutionary resolve and resiliency is the manner with which we have responded to the natural calamity in the form of drought that befell upon us in 1984 – 1985. With out jeopardizing the country's plans, the Party and Government responded to the famine situation quickly by timely alerting the international community of the impending danger, and mobilizing whatever resources we could muster, including a levy of one-month's income payable in a year and other stringent measures designed to redistribute resources from those who have and are less needy to those who need most. In addition, the Government launched a Resettlement Programme, whereby people who were subjected to famine in the Northern drought-prone regions, would be resettled in the Southern and Western less populated and potentially more fertile regions. As a result of these and other timely measures, as well as the genuine international assistance, the famine situation has been contained, and our compatriots who have been resettled are now leading a more normal life.

As indicated by our Revolutionary leader, Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam in his March 24, 1987 Central Report to the 6th plenum of the CC of WPE, whereas in 1985 an estimated 11 million

of our people were in need of assistance against famine, today, that number has been reduced to 2.5 million and no effort is spared to develop our agricultural economy so as to attain self-sufficiency in food grain production. Toward this end, a new agricultural development strategy with the aim of self-sufficiency in the production of food has been launched.

In her foreign relations too, Revolutionary Ethiopia follows a consistent policy of peace and friendly relations with all nations. Though she had been victim to numerous imperialist and expansionist invasions and incursions throughout much of her existence as a state, Ethiopia has never committed aggression against any country or violated the territorial integrity of her neighbors. The guidelines of the foreign policy of Revolutionary Ethiopia have been articulated in the Programme of WPE during the latter's founding Congress in September, 1984. Accordingly Ethiopia's foreign policy rests on the following major principles."

- Active support for the maintenance of regional and international peace.
- Proletarian Internationalism meaning solidarity with the socialist countries and with the progressive, democratic, peace-loving and national libe-



Comrade Mengistu addressing the OAU summit

ration forces of the world.

- Anti-imperialism, anti-neocolonialism, anti-racism and against all forms of oppression and exploitation.
- Peaceful coexistence with all nations based on equality, mutual interest and respect for socio-economic systems

chosen by peoples and respect for the UN and the OAU charters as well as the principles of the non-aligned movement.

- Special emphasis to strengthen positive relations with neighbors based on equality, mutual interest, sovereignty and territorial integrity, peace-



Comrade Mengistu addressing the people of Cuba, in

ful resolution of conflicts and disputes, non-interference in the internal affairs of others, and strict adherence to the principles and charters of the UN, OAU and the non-aligned movement.

- Special attention to the emancipation struggle of the peoples of Africa both from social

backwardness and imperialist domination and exploitation.

- Commitment to world peace, freedom and human rights.
- Maintaining the dialectical link between socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism, so that the forces of imperialism and reaction do not exploit narrow nationa-



the city of Havana in August 1977

lism to divide and weaken the unity and solidarity of the progressive forces of the world.

These are the noble and lofty ideals and principles that Revolutionary Ethiopia lives by and conducts her international relations. The Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia also reaffirms that the Republic's foreign policy will be based on the principles of Proletarian Internationalism, peaceful coexistence and Non-Alignment (Article 27).

In thirteen short years, Revolutionary Ethiopia has been transformed from being a neo-colonial dependency to being one of the militant forces in the progressive, democratic and peace-loving camp of the world. The solidarity between Revolutionary Ethiopia and these forces has been growing and will continue to be mutually beneficial. The socialist countries and the progressive forces of the world have come to Ethiopia's assistance when it was attacked by the reactionary ruling regime of Somalia in the summer of 1977 and again during the height of the famine in the 1984-85 period as well as giving Ethiopia the moral, psychological and diplomatic support in her struggles against the forces of international imperialism and reaction on many fronts and forums. For its part Revolutionary Ethiopia

has availed itself to strengthen its solidarity with many progressive, peace-loving and national liberation forces." Consequently, Ethiopia plays an active role in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), the World Peace Council (WPC), the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OAATU), the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) and many other international organizations with similar persuasion and commitment. Ethiopia also plays a leading role in advancing the causes of the ANC and SWAPO in Southern Africa. Besides what it has been doing so far for the cause of African liberation and unity, Revolutionary Ethiopia has recently declared its readiness to train as many as 10,000 freedom fighters from Southern Africa as part of her contribution to the cause of struggle against Apartheid and imperialism in Southern Africa. In the Middle East, Revolutionary Ethiopia continues to stand behind the just cause of the struggle of the Palestinian people. The WPE has also forged close fraternal links with many communist and workers parties and democratic organizations in many countries.

Needless to say Revolutionary Ethiopia's relations with the socialist world has reached a new peak, and the country enjoys the most amicable of relations with all the socialist countries on the



With Comrade Gorbachov

basis of the principle of Proletarian Internationalism. It has a long-term friendship and cooperation treaty agreements signed with nearly all of them and it enjoys also particularly close and friendly relations with many progressive and democratic states in the developing world.¹⁰

As always Ethiopia lays particular emphasis on its relations with its neighbors on the one hand, and on its historic role in the African continent on the other. Thus, Revolutionary Ethiopia has from the very threshold of the Revolution in 1974 made the

utmost effort to strengthen positive, peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with the Sudan, Somalia, Kenya and Djibouti. It has made considerable progress in forging good and positive relations with all of them save the expansionist and irredentist somalian regime. Even with Somali efforts to improve relations continue unabated on Ethiopia's part. As the seat of the headquarters of the OAU and the ECA, Ethiopia is permanently committed to advance the cause of the African peoples' struggle for freedom and social progress.

Footnotes

1. See Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, London, 1983, p. 283.

2. For the texts of these and other Proclamations in 1975-76 see *Basic Documents of the Ethiopian Revolution*, Addis Ababa, 1977.

3. Cf. Comrade Mengistu Hailemariam's *March 24, 1987 Report to the 6th Plenum of the CC of WPE*.

4. Cf. Ethiopia: *A Decade of Revolutionary Transformation*, Addis Ababa, 1984, p. 53.

5. See *Ibid.*, pp. 31-49.

6. See Comrade Mengistu Hailemariam's *central Report to the Founding Congress of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia* (hereafter referred to as WPE F.C.C.R.)

7. *Ibid.* p.76

8. see *Ethiopia's 10-year Perspective Plan* (1985-1995), Addis Ababa, 1985.

9. For details, see the *Programme of the WPE*, pp. 139-147.

10. Cf. *Proletarian Internationalism and the Ethiopian Revolution*, Addis Ababa, 1984, for details.

CHAPTER V

THE FORMATION OF WPE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Concerning the unique qualities of the Ethiopian Revolution, Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, on one occasion said:

What sets the Ethiopian Revolution apart from other revolutions is its ability to initiate drastic measures, without having the benefit of a Marxist-Leninist vanguard Party, and still manages to foil subversive activities. The fact that the Armed Forces which were moulded under the feudo-bourgeois system have until now stood firm and struggled for the democratic advancement of the broad masses is the novel aspect of our revolution.'

The Ethiopian Revolution, which won the admiration of the progressive world by its capacity to initiate far-reaching socio-economic and political changes in the Ethiopian society, when it emerged in 1974, did not have the benefit of the leadership of a vanguard Party. Owing to the absence of democratic political traditions in the country, when the revolutionary upsurge of the masses of the people began to take place in February 1974, there was not even a bourgeois political organization, let alone a

Marxist-Leninist vanguard party that would provide a conscious and organized leadership to the Revolution.

Apart from its mass and spontaneous nature, which could only be upheld on the basis of a sharp class struggle, the most surprising thing about the Ethiopian Revolution was that revolutionary leadership was provided by the armed forces of the country. Such a revolutionary surprise of course had its own hidden logic. It had to be either the army or nobody. If not, Ethiopia would have become a society torn apart, and without any social order at all. Thus the objective situation of the country, namely a country lacking a true government when it most needed it, and of the people without any ideological or organizational vehicle that could implant a new social order, provided the army, the only social institution still intact, a mandate to assume the leadership of the Revolution.

But to assume the revolutionary leadership of the country in whose name? At the service of which class? These were some of the series of the burning questions that confronted the Provisional Military Administrative

Council (PMAC), when it assumed state power in September 1974. The PMAC, being cognizant of the experiences of the various historical revolutionary movements which failed to materialize, owing to the absence of a well organized revolutionary leadership, came to the conclusion, that if the Ethiopian revolution were to emerge victorious, it had to have a Marxist-Leninist political party as its foremost leader. Towards this end, the revolutionary Government not only made a call to the various progressive individuals and underground political groups that began mushrooming in the country following the upsurge of the revolution for the purpose of organizing a vanguard party, but also created all the necessary conditions to expedite the process.

As revolutionary theory and experience amply demonstrate, an oppressed people can defend and consolidate its revolutionary gains only when it is fully conscious politically and is well organized and armed. The revolutionary government once having dislodged the ruling feudal aristocracy and its cohorts from their eminent political positions, and after having deprived them of their immense economic wealth, proceeded toward creating a favourable environment for raising the political consciousness, organizing and arming the broad Ethiopian masses. With the decla-

ration of socialism as the guiding principle of the revolution, all those hitherto proscribed revolutionary literatures, including the classics of Marxism-Leninism, began to freely circulate all over the country and to be translated into the vernaculars of the country as well. Popular discussion forums, with the objective of acquainting the masses of the people with the goals and objectives of the revolution, with the forces that allied with the revolution and also with those forces that oppose and attack it, were organized in such places as the Urban Dwellers' Associations, in governmental offices, in schools, in factories, in farm areas and also in military barracks.

In this respect, the most favourable condition was created by the declaration of the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), on April 17, 1976. The declaration of the Programme was a milestone in the revolutionary process in that it not only put the revolution on a solid scientific ground by clearly articulating its immediate and long-range objectives but also significantly contributed for the acceleration of the revolutionary process of politicising, organizing and arming the broad masses for the defence of the gains of the revolution. With the declaration of the National Democratic Revolution Programme, two important political institutions

were also established by the Revolutionary Government that gave further impetus to the Revolutionary process. These were the Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs (POMOA), and the Yekatit 66 Political School. POMOA'S mission was to help organize and educate the broad Ethiopian masses in the science of the class struggle, while that of the Yekatit 66 Political School was to train cadres selected from the ranks of the various mass organizations, state organs, from the armed forces as well as from the other sectors of the society. In the political and ideological spheres, these and the other related measures were taken, on the one hand, to further consolidate the revolutionary process, and on the other, to facilitate the ground for the establishment of the vanguard party as the foremost leader of the Ethiopian Revolution.

The process of party formation was initiated with the establishment of POMOA, and the Yekatit 66 Political School in May 1976. The Revolutionary Government had entrusted to these two institutions the responsibility of propagating the scientific ideology among the broad Ethiopian masses, with the view of creating appropriate conditions for the eventual establishment of the vanguard party. As a result of the activities of these two political institutions and

through the unreserved material and political support rendered by the Revolutionary Government, five underground political organizations formed the Union of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations in February, 1977². All of them had taken similar positions on such important political issues as, for instance, the class content and revolutionary role of the PMAC, on the question of party formation, on the strategy to be adopted by the Ethiopian Revolution to resolve the nationalities issue, and finally on the correct position that the Ethiopian Revolution should take concerning political tendencies at the international level that followed erroneous political lines, as regards the international communist movement³.

It was believed that in due course a merger among the five underground political organizations would take place and that the vanguard party of Ethiopia would be established. But since it is a truism that revolution involves contradictions, as soon as the five underground political organizations declared a political unity among themselves, problems and contradictions began to emerge. In August 1977, just seven months after the formation of the Union of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations, one of the founding members of the Union, namely, the All

Ethiopia Socialist Movement (MEISON), deserted the Ethiopian Revolution on very flimsy political grounds at a very trying and difficult time both for the safety of the Revolution and the territorial integrity of Revolutionary Ethiopia, and consequently joined the ranks of the counterrevolution. ECHIAT, another member of the union was expelled from the membership of the union due to the erroneous political line it was advancing. This was not the only problem that confronted the Union of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations in particular and that of the Ethiopian Revolution in general at that time. It is a well known fact that the principle of democratic centralism is the hallmark of any Marxist-Leninist Organization that aspires for a revolutionary leadership. But in the case of the Union of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations, each member of the union, having its own organizational structure and political programme, it was found to be impossible to forge a common identity of views on all the burning political issues of the day, and to rally member organizations around one organizational structure, one programme and one leadership. Under such circumstances it was found to be an impossible task to form the vanguard party of Ethiopia through the merger of the Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist organiza-

tions as was originally envisaged.

Confronted with such problems, the remaining members of the Union of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations had to map out an altogether new strategy for the establishment of the vanguard party of Ethiopia. The new strategy adopted was that instead of mechanically joining the various underground political organizations a new center had to be created that could assemble all those genuine revolutionaries who had practically demonstrated their dedication and loyalty to the triumph of the Ethiopian Revolution⁴. The new center that was to assemble all those genuine revolutionaries was to be led by Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, who through his ceaseless efforts and decisive leadership had symbolized the determination of the Ethiopian people to build a new society free from exploitation and oppression. And consequently the Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE), which served as the new centre for establishing the vanguard party of Ethiopia came into being on December 18, 1979, and effectively commenced its tasks as of June, 1980.

During its four and a half years of existence as a party preparatory body, COPWE has contributed significantly in accele-

rating the process of party formation. Through its two Congresses, eight plenary meetings of the Central Committee, one extraordinary session and through the many Executive Committee meetings of the commission, an ideal condition was created for the establishment of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia in September, 1984⁵.

Though COPWE was primarily organized to facilitate the process of party formation, in its day to day activities it also functioned as a full-fledged Marxist-Leninist party for all practical purposes. And as such, its organizational structure and modes of operation resembled that of a typical Marxist-Leninist party. At the apex of its organizational structure there was a congress that formulated and passed all those relevant political and organizational decisions that the Commission was charged to implement in its task of expediting the process of party formation. Below the Congress there was the Central Committee that guided the work of the Commission in between the sessions of the Congress; and under the Central Committee there was an Executive Committee which oversaw and guided the day to day activities of the Commission. In addition to these central bodies, COPWE also had a network of organizational structures that

connected it with the broad Ethiopian masses. These were the regional, sub-regional, and district committees as well as the primary organizations.

In the task of expediting the process of Party formation, COPWE had to pass through three distinct phases. The first one was the phase of preparation which ended in the calling of the First Congress of COPWE which took place from the 16th to the 19th of June, 1980. During this phase all the necessary organizational rules and regulations that were to govern the activities of the Commission were prepared. In addition, due to the unique strategy that Ethiopian revolutionaries adopted in establishing the vanguard party, all those leading cadres who were to guide and oversee the day to day activities of the commission both at the center and also from the regional all the way down to the primary organization levels were selected and appointed at the center during this time .

The second phase of the Commission was that of intense activities for laying down the organizational structure of the Commission. During this phase an intensive recruitment of prospective members for the Commission was undertaken. Existing mass organizations such as the Ethiopian Trade Union (ETU), the Eth-

iopean Peasant Association (EPA), and the Urban Dwellers Association (UDA's), were strengthened and consolidated further. The Revolutionary Ethiopia Youth Association (REYA), the Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association (REWA), and the Working People's Control Committees were also established on a nation-wide basis during this phase. In addition, also during this period, the organizational structure of COPWE was further

extended to regions, sub-regions and districts with the primary organizations serving as a foundation. This phase ended in the calling of the Second Congress of COPWE which took place from January 4th to the 7th, 1983.

The third and last phase of the activities of COPWE concerned the further consolidation of the Commission both organizationally and ideologically and the final preparation for the formation of the vanguard party of



The Founding Congress of the WPE

Ethiopia. During this final phase, not only such important documents as the party programme and the party rules were prepared for approval by the Founding Congress, but also the various organs of the party, beginning from the primary organizations up to the regional party committee levels were constituted through direct election. This phase ended with the holding of the Founding Congress of the Workers' party of Ethiopia (WPE)

in September, 1984 with over 2,000 Party members participating as delegates and also with over 100 foreign delegations representing the fraternal parties, progressive organizations and the National Liberation Movements attending the proceedings of the Congress as observers. This was a truly historic occasion not only to Ethiopian revolutionaries who struggled selflessly for almost a decade to found a truly vanguard party to



guarantee the ultimate success of the Ethiopian Revolution, but also for the international revolutionary movement, whose objective is to struggle for the building of a progressive and humane social order everywhere."

The Workers' Party of Ethiopia, which came into being through the indefatigable efforts of Ethiopian revolutionaries and especially that of Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, on September 10, 1984, is today the leading political force of the Ethiopian society. The Party, though still young in comparison with other fraternal Parties that have accumulated a rich experience, in its three years of existence, has demonstrated its capacity to provide the Ethiopian society with a capable leadership. This was clearly demonstrated in the timely and decisive measures that it took when Revolutionary Ethiopia was hit by a catastrophic drought in 1984-1985, affecting close to nine million people. To meet this national emergency head-on, the Workers' Party of Ethiopia, mobilized all the resources of the country within a short period of time so as to provide immediate relief in the form of food, medicine, clothing and shelter to our compatriots who were seriously affected by the drought. To provide a lasting solution to the problem, it also drew a National Resettlement Programme that could enable drought victims to lead a better

social life. The result of this measure was that within a short period of time, close to half a million of our compatriots were relocated from the drought-prone regions of Northern Ethiopia to the more fertile regions of Western and Southern Ethiopia.

The other area where the Party's role as a leading political and social force has been clearly demonstrated has been in the sphere of politics and particularly in the preparatory work to found the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The WPE, which right after its birth in September, 1984 gave priority attention to the founding of the PDRE, has been in the forefront in the struggle to materialize this important objective. Under the dynamic leadership of the WPE, not only the constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was drafted and approved through a referendum with the active participation of the masses of the people, but a National Shengo, with a membership of 835 People's Deputies has been elected, paving the way for the assumption of state power by the masses of the people. Of the numerous political, ideological, organizational, economic and social tasks that the WPE carries out in its capacity as the leading social force of the Ethiopian society, these two examples were selected to illustrate the dynamic

role that the WPE is playing in the life of the Ethiopian people today. There is no doubt that under the capable leadership of the WPE, the Ethiopian masses

will not only be liberated from social backwardness, but will build a new society that will enable them to lead a free and happy social life.

References

1. *The PMAC Chairman and the World Press*, A publication released by the Ministry of Information and National Guidance, February 14, 1978, pp.27-28.
2. The five underground political organizations were: The all Ethiopian Socialist Movement (Meisone), Abyotawi Seded, Waz League, Malerid and Echat.
3. A Communique released by the Union of Ethiopian Marxist Leninist organizations, Addis Ababa, February, 1977.
4. For the decision taken by Union of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations and by the Revolutionary Government, see *Voice of Unity*, a publication of the Union of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations, Vol.2, No 6, May 1978.
5. For the Contribution made by COPWE to accelerate the process of Party Formation, See the *Central Report, delivered by Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam to the Founding Congress of the WPE*, September 4, 1984, Addis Ababa, pp.141-144.
6. Concerning the distinctive phases that COPWE passed through, see *Ethiopia A Decade of Revolutionary Transformation*, pp.23-30

CHAPTER VI

THE EMERGENCE OF THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA

The People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has now come into being. The country has come a long way especially in the past thirteen years of bitter revolutionary struggle against internal and external class enemies. In the life span of an ancient country like Ethiopia whose history goes way back to thousands of years, a time frame of thirteen years is but a tiny speck in what the Ethiopian poet lauret Tsegaye Gebremedhin called *Footprint of Time*. Yet in the past 13 gruelling and glorious years, Revolutionary Ethiopia has taken a giant step towards establishing a social system based on justice, equality, peace and progress for the working people. It has made an impressive leap from feudal autocracy towards laying down firm foundations for the establishment of a People's Democracy. The 1974 popular revolution has catapulted Ethiopia to a new revolutionary stage in world history and through their dogged and determined struggle, the broad masses of Ethiopia have proved that they are up to it.

In his comprehensive Central Report to the Founding Congress of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia in September 1984, Com-

rade Mengistu Haile Mariam detailed the contours of building the new political system in Ethiopia, the democratic solution to the nationalities issue, the direction of the country's economic and social development, the construction of a new socialist culture and education, the revolution's alliance with the world progressive forces and the leading role of WPE.

In reference to the envisaged new political system, comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam compared the essence of People's democracies and the dictatorship of the proletariat and described the essential features of the former as follows:¹

Even though the class content and social base of people's democracies was that of the working class and the peasantry, they also embraced several democratic elements, including the bourgeoisie. At the time of the establishment of the People's Democracies, the measures taken to dismantle the former state machinery were neither swift nor radical. Due to the force of circumstances, the former state

apparatuses were retained for a while. With the exception of Fascist collaborators and war criminals, all citizens the right to elect and to be elected, to organize politically and, in general, to enjoy political rights.

People's Democracies are thus transitional forms of states that facilitate the material and spiritual conditions for constructing socialism in countries that have undergone National Democratic Revolutions. People's democracies are led by Marxist-Leninist principles and modes of operation.

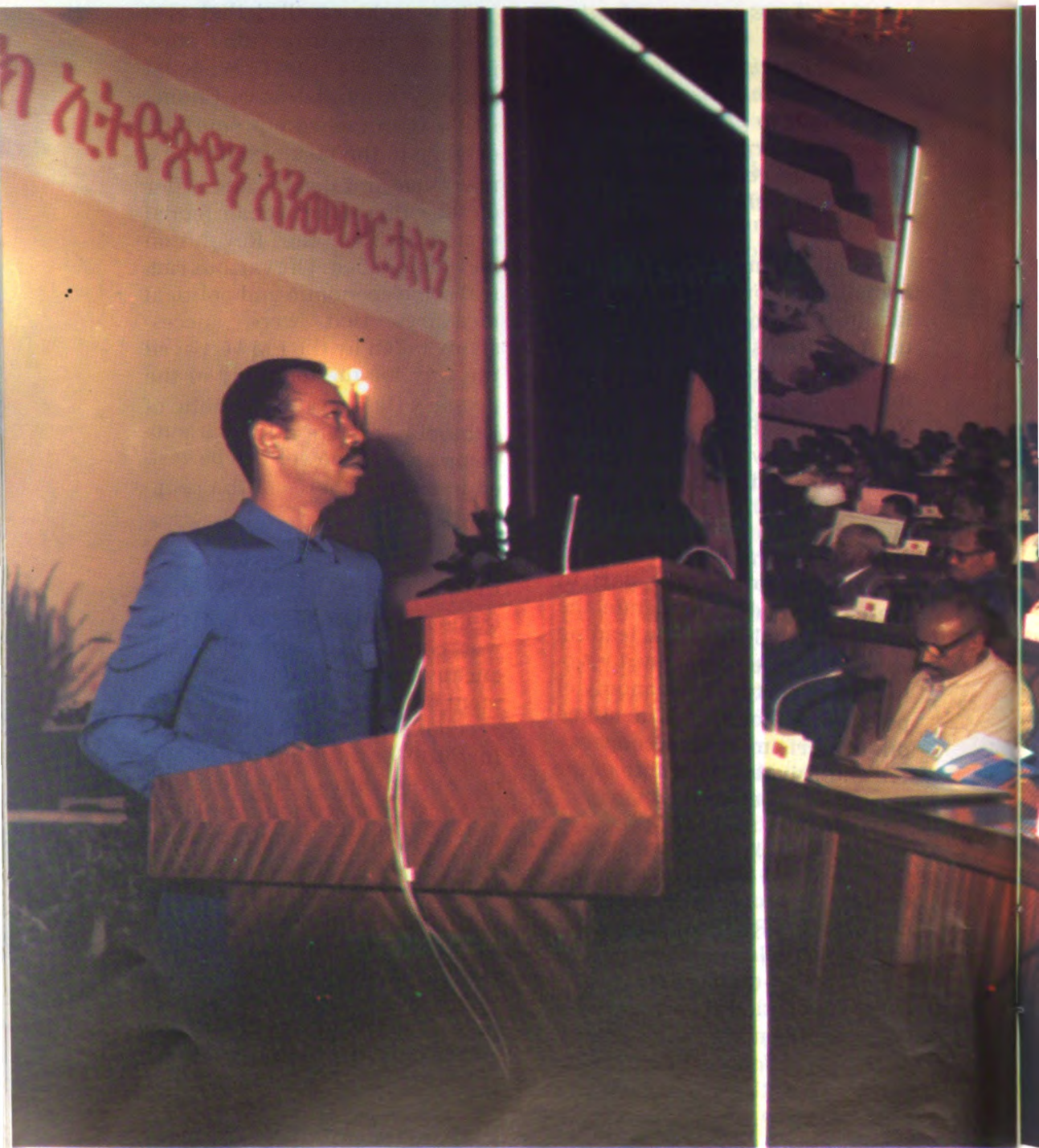
While several democratic and progressive forces take part in the activities of the new state, the working people play the leading role led by their vanguard revolutionary party. The economy of people's democracy is a mixed one comprising of state, cooperative and private ownership of the means of production.

Accordingly, the Programme of WPE states that the emerging People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE), "will be founded on the alliance of the working class and the peasantry, and the collaboration of the revolutionary intelligentsia, the revolutionary armed forces, handicraftsmen and office workers who stand for the objectives of the revolution."²

It is to be recalled that ever since it came to assume state power in 1974, the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) attached supreme importance to the task of building a new, just and democratic order on the ruins of the archaic feudal system which the Revolution had demolished. The various radical socio-economic and political measures that were successively taken by the PMAC paved the way for the founding of the people's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia - a state in which supreme political power will be vested upon the masses of the people.

The process of laying down the foundation for the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was concretized with the issuance by the Revolutionary Government on 13th February, 1983, of a proclamation establishing the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities. The Institute was entrusted with the vital task of compiling comprehensive studies on the history, culture and general mode of life of the various nationalities of the country and on this basis prepare a draft document that would reflect the interests and aspirations of the people, including their legitimate assumption of state power.

Soon working groups of scholars and experts drawn from the





various academic disciplines were dispatched by the Institute to the different parts of the country to collect relevant data. Others were sent abroad to countries with varying political systems and stages of development to study their experiences. The country's traditional laws and former constitutions were analyzed. The various proclamations and directives issued by the Revolutionary Government, the basic documents of the Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia (COPWE), and the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE), were closely scrutinized and analyzed from various angles.

It was after all these prelimi-

nary steps had been taken and a solid foundation for the compilation of a working document for the preparation of the draft constitution had been laid down, that the actual preparation of the draft constitution was started. Various task groups were set up along with the Constitution Drafting Commission (CDC), which was established by proclamation on 13th February 1986. Composed of representatives of party and state organs, the mass organizations, religious and professional bodies as well as renowned individuals, the CDC was primarily entrusted with the responsibility of preparing a draft constitution that would lay down a legal basis for the democratic transfer of



Popular discussion being conducted on the Draft Constitution

state power to the working people in line with the objectives of the Revolution. The commission, comprising of 343 individuals and assisted by the able staff of the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities, prepared a working draft. The draft was then released to the public for open and democratic discussion.

For two Sundays and one full working day early in June, 1986 popular discussions were held in 25,000 discussion forums throughout the country as well as abroad on the Draft Constitution; and all kinds of channels were established to receive reactions, proposals, questions and amendments by all citizens above the age of 18. The Draft was also translated into 15 local and three foreign languages. Without doubt the democratic discussions on the Draft Constitution have been among the most conclusive evidences that the revolution has succeeded in asserting the democratic rights of the masses of the people.

The Draft Constitution, which was enriched by over 500,000 suggestions, opinions and ideas generated by the people during the course of the discussions, was amended by the Constitution Drafting Commission on the basis of the suggestions forwarded by the people. The amended version of the Draft Constitution was put to a referendum on

February 1, 1987, and was approved by 81% of the voters. Of those registered to vote in the referendum, a total of 14,035,718 or 96% cast their ballots.

Since it is stipulated in the Constitution that the highest state organ of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is the National Shengo (parliament), a national election was held during the month of June 1987, to constitute this highest state organ. For the purpose of representing the 46 million Ethiopians in the National *Shengo*, the country was divided into 835 electoral districts, each electoral district in the rural area, representing on the average about 75,000 people and in the cities and towns about 15,000 people. For each electoral district a minimum of 3 candidates whose competence and allegiance to the cause of the revolution as well as to the welfare of the masses had been duly confirmed, were nominated by the organs of the WPE, the mass organizations and the revolutionary Armed forces. On election day the masses of the people flocked to their respective polling stations and cast their ballots for the deputies who will represent them at the National *Shengo*.

The People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia that will soon become a reality in Revolutionary Ethiopia will be a state that will serve the interests of the



Casting ballots for election of Deputies to the National Shengo

broad Ethiopian masses. The social basis, the organizational structures and the working procedures of the new republic will be based on the fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist state formation and working procedures. Accordingly, democratic centralism, socialist legality, internationalism and the conscious and active participation of the masses of the people in all aspects of life will be the defining characteristics of the new republic.

In the new republic, state power, ranging from the lowest administrative unit to the national level, will rest in the hands of, and will be expressed by elected representatives of the people. Consequently, all those state organs starting from the lowest to the highest level will be answerable and accountable to the people's representatives. Moreover, since in the new state to be realized soon, discrimination based on sex, religion, race and nationality will have no place, the fostering of equality, brotherhood and mutual assistance between and among the various nationalities of the country will be the hallmark of the new republic. Furthermore, since according to the principle of socialist legality, any state body, mass organization or citizen will have the duty to respect without any reservations, the country's constitution, and such other directives and measures as

emanate from the constitution and other regulations, the republic will see to it that every one will respect the constitution and abide by its regulations. In the new republic, people's deputies too, will not be isolated from the electorate, but will be in constant touch with the masses of the people, work with them and maintain their relations on a daily basis with the people. In brief, the republic that will soon become a reality in Revolutionary Ethiopia will be a genuine People's state. Its leaders will be drawn from among the ranks of the people, and will not be above them, as is the case in class based societies, but directly answerable and accountable to them.

Let us now briefly examine some of the highlights of the Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. In order to appreciate better and more sharply where the country was yesterday and where it has arrived today in the realm of constitutional development, we shall contrast some of the provisions of the new constitution against those of the 1955 revised Constitution that was in force until the upsurge of the Revolution, in 1974.³

1. Whereas political power and sovereignty in the old Constitution was vested "in the Emperor" (Article 26), in the PDRE, political power

and sovereignty belong “to the working people” (Article 3), and this power is expressed by the “National Shengo”, directly elected by the people. (Article 63)

2. Whereas in multi-religious Ethiopia, one religion was the established faith of the Empire, (Article 126), now in the People’s Democratic Republic of Ethiopia “State and religion are separate” and freedom of conscience is respected. (Article 47)
3. Whereas to be elected to the legislative assembly in the old system ownership of property (Article 96) was a *sine qua non*, in the PDRE it is stipulated that everyone has the right at the age of twenty one “to stand for election to organs of state power, irrespective of nationality, sex, religion, occupation, social or other status”. (Article 51)
4. Whereas in the *ancien regime* the Emperor was “sacred, inviolable and his power indisputable” (Article 5) and his subjects only had the right to “present petitions to him” (Article 63), in the new Constitution of the PDRE, “citizens have the right to submit complaints against organs of state, mass organizations or officials thereof. Such complaints must be examined and respon-

ded to” (Article 53). The electorate in the PDRE also has the right “to recall a deputy of the National Shengo (or Assembly) where he/she fails to justify its confidence (Article 67).

5. Whereas the defunct system governed the country as an Empire (Article 1), with no rhyme or reason as regards its social, economic and political complexion, the PDRE is a Unitary State, within which are to be found “administrative and autonomous regions” (Article 9) that would give a democratic expression to the rights of nationalities and a Marxist-Leninist solution to the nationalities issue.
6. Whereas in the pre-Revolution regime, the two legislative chambers represented two sides of the same coin i.e. propertied landed gentry in one chamber, and princes, dignitaries and high government officials in the other chamber (Article 103), now in the PDRE, the National Shengo comprises of genuine representatives of the working people and the nationalities nominated by the organs of the WPE, the mass organizations, the Revolutionary Army and other bodies entitled by law and directly elected by the people (Articles 56, 66).

7. Whereas in the revised 1955 constitution, an aspirant to the parliament swore allegiance and fidelity to the Emperor (Article 25), in the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, a people's deputy pledges to dedicate himself/herself to the freedom and unity of the country and to socialism, and "to give precedence to the will and interest of the working people..." (Article 80)

8. Whereas in the *ancien regime* the sovereign was accountable to no one, in the PDRE, the President of the Republic is "accountable to the National Shengo" (Article 85), by which he is elected for a five year term.

9. Whereas in the old system, the Emperor dispensed with justice through his courts (Article 35), in the PDRE, "the highest judicial organ is the supreme court" elected by the National *Shengo*. (Article 63)

Besides the above points which clearly show the constitutional advances attained in the course of the last 13 years of revolutionary struggle, there are also new and higher forms of rights, duties and prospects for the working people of Ethiopia in the new Republic.

The PDRE ensures the equal development and respectability of all the languages of the nationalities (Article 2) even as it recognizes the need for a common working language for state activities (Article 117). The role and significance of the mass organizations as forums for political participation and mobilization is also constitutionalized (Article 7). The need for protecting the ecological balance of the environment is noted (Article 10). The social significance of labour and the socialist principle of labour are also enshrined in the new Republic's constitution (Article 18). The guidelines of the country's foreign policy, namely proletarian internationalism, peaceful co-existence and non-alignment are well articulated (Article 28). To redress the thousands of years of double oppression and exploitation (sexual and class) of women, the PDRE commits itself (Article 37) to uphold the equality of women with men. Marriage is also given state protection (Article 38). The right to work (Article 39), the right to free education (Article 41) and the right to health care (Article 43) for all Ethiopians is guaranteed in the constitution of the PDRE.

Another new element in the PDRE is the use of the referendum to determine the popular will on major national issues,

including first and foremost the endorsement of the new constitution. The foregoing therefore, represent some of the signposts

traversed on the road to establish the rule of People's Democracy in Ethiopia in the form of the PDRE.

FOOTNOTES

1. Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam, *Central Report Delivered to the Founding Congress of the Workers' Party of Ethiopia*, September, 1984, p. 23.
2. See the *WPE Programme*, approved by the Founding Congress, September 1984, p. 34.
3. References to the old constitution are taken from *Consolidated Laws of Ethiopia*, Vol. I. The reference to the new constitution is from the English translation of the draft constitution, June 1986. Addis Ababa.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the preceding chapters we have traversed decades, if not centuries of Ethiopian history as we highlighted the country's astounding transition from the rule of feudal autocracy to that of a people's democracy. After centuries of struggle, the Ethiopian people shrugged off the yoke of feudal rule in the popular Revolution of 1974 under the slogan of *Ethiopia Tikdem*, or "Let Ethiopia go forward"

In the past thirteen dramatic years, the Ethiopian working people have paid many sacrifices and have chalked up very impressive results, running the gamut from land to the tiller to thwarting the attack of the combined forces of internal and external counter-revolution to tumbling down the illiteracy rate from 95% to 34% to organizing themselves in mass organizations to establishing the vanguard working class party in the form of the WPE, and finally to bringing themselves to the threshold of establishing a people's rule, in the form of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE). In the process Revolutionary Ethiopia also has become a strong and committed bulwark of anti-imperialism, anti-racism as well as a

staunch vanguard in the struggle for peace in the region and in the world at large.

The strategic aim of the People's Democratic Republic is the completion of the National Democratic Revolution and the laying down of the spiritual and material foundations for the building of socialism. Based on the WPE programme, the PDRE will translate into reality the country's economic, social and cultural development policies. In addition, under the PDRE, care and attention will be given to resolving the issue of nationalities. As clearly elaborated in the constitution adopted democratically by the working people of Ethiopia, the PDRE is a unitary state in which all nationalities live in equality (Article 2) and in which political power belongs to the working people (Article 3). To that end, not only the representation of nationalities is ensured in the *National Shengo*, but administrative and autonomous *Shengos* will be established to provide the appropriate framework for the self-rule and selfadministration of nationalities in the form of regional autonomy.

In these endeavors, the critical and decisive leadership of

WPE, the vanguard political organization of the working people of Ethiopia cannot be overstated. Although a socialist oriented revolution may erupt without a vanguard party, as this has been well demonstrated by the experience of our revolution, it cannot attain its ultimate objective without a working-class party. The emergence of WPE in September 1984, after a decade of gruelling and pitched class struggles, has opened a new vista for the triumph of socialism in this ancient and rejuvenated land of Ethiopia.

Revolutionary Ethiopia has achieved much in the past 13 years of Revolutionary struggle. It is clear that the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia will have to resolve a number of chronic and acute problems in the realm of economic development and overall social progress. As in the past, we in Ethiopia are, however, confident that through the resolute leadership of the WPE and the new State, the country will meet all challenges and will continue to register even more resounding victories in the future.

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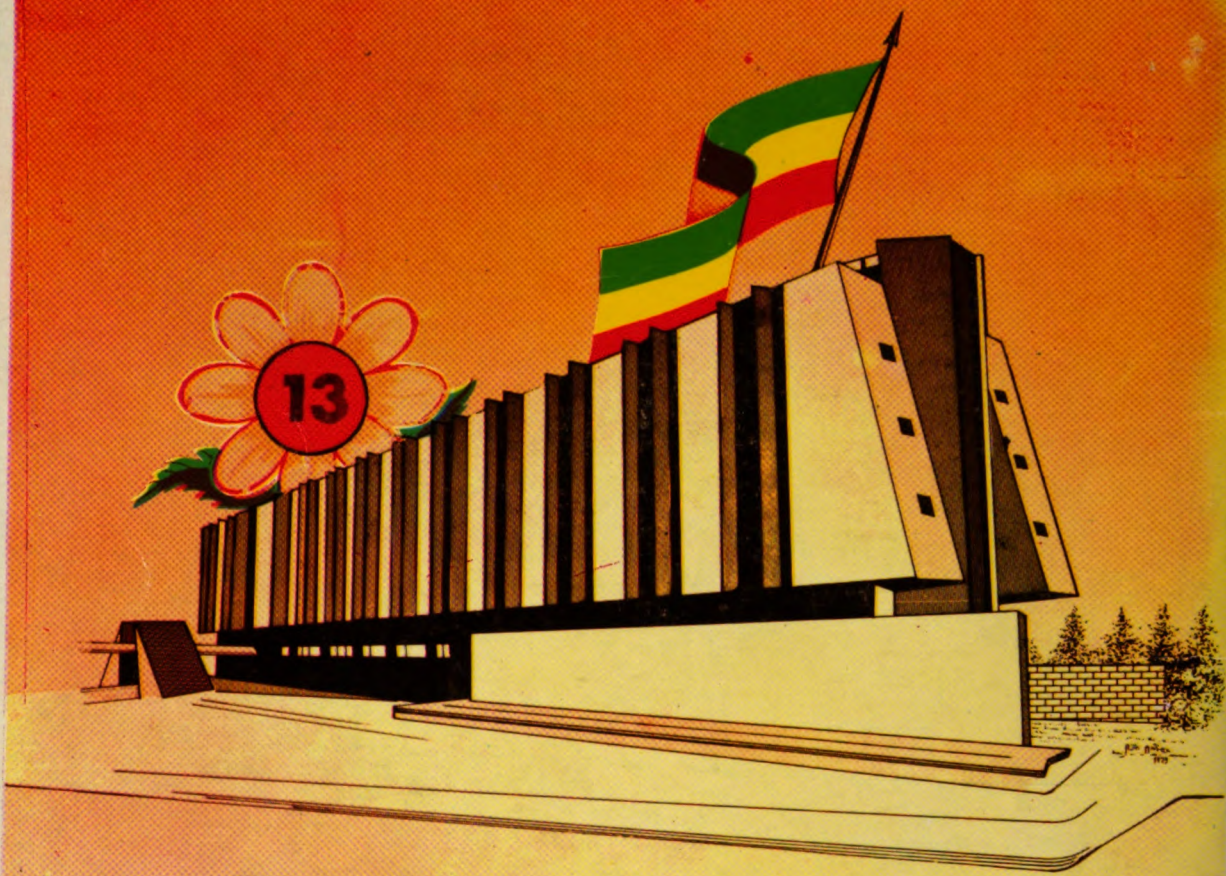
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